

BRINGING THE OLD WORLD HOME

Charles Nevinson rescues and expertly restores

Europe's most precious architectural antiques

BY DONNA SOPER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID SCHILLING

For the last 27 years, Charles Nevinson has been on a rescue mission—an Architectural antiques rescue mission, that is.

The Englishman who started his career as a design and development profession in London, has perfected a personal passion for antique architectural elements into a thriving business that is widely respected across the United States and Europe for its meticulous attention to detail.

Started in 1981, Architectural Accents, which is housed in a former dairy on Piedmont Road at Miami Circle, is now a bustling operation. The 30,000 square-foot building sits on three acres, nearly all of which are covered with the business of collecting, rebuilding, restoring, refinishing and selling antique doors and door hardware, including hinges, knobs, and keys; lighting fixtures such as

chandeliers, lanterns, and sconces and other accent pieces, including wooden and stone fireplace mantels and wrought iron, balustrades, fences, and gates.

There's virtually nothing we don't cover in terms of architecture," Nevinson said "but we are not a salvage yard. We salvage things, yes, but we go a lot further."

What that means, Nevinson says, is that Architectural Accents retrieves and flawlessly restores, 16th, 17th, 18th, and early 19th century British, French, Spanish, and Russian architectural elements for reuse. To that end, the store has several workshops at the rear where skilled employees spend hours polishing centuries-old brass and iron doorknobs and hinges and refining them with specialized screws, repairing light fixtures, refinishing doors, repairing stained glass, and restoring

stone mantels.

"If you buy a pair of antique doorknobs, for example, and something is missing, we can painstakingly restore it, and hopefully one can't tell the difference," he said. "Because nowadays everything is replaceable no one knows how to repair anything. We, however, do."

That capability of not only rescuing but repairing and refinishing unique architectural pieces so they are completely functional is what is largely responsible for the store's wide following.

"We have a long history here,"

Nevinson continued. "We are very good at what we do. There are people that offer some of our services but in terms of full service, we are rather peerless."

Though European antique architectural items are becoming more of a rarity.

Nevinson said the interest in them has only increased. "The more difficulty they are to find the more desired they are" he said. To that end, Architectural Accents offers a selection of architectural reproductions including mantels and lighting fixtures. "We do reproductions of a select 40 to 60 cast-stone mantel pieces, and we do carved as well," Nevinson said. "We also release one new design for a reproduction lighting fixture each year."

Architectural Accents caters mostly to architects and designers who are looking for a particular style for the project. "We don't sell anything here," Nevinson said. "It sells itself."

However, Nevinson, who continues to accept design projects in what little spare time he has, said he is not averse to offering advice.

"For the level at which we work, we are fairly blunt about why things would or would not work," he said. "In many cases, the client is as interested as the designer is in what they are looking for, but they are not always knowledgeable.

"For example, a client might indicate that he is interested in a Country French look, but that has a very wide meaning," Nevinson said, "so he must ascertain the regional style, whether it is Northern, Central, or Provencal."

Nevinson said he's been fortunate over the years to have made several noteworthy European contacts who will call him when rare item becomes available.

"I know the people very well," he said. "I spend at least three months per year in Europe, and I am on the phone and on the Internet with my clients, colleagues on a daily basis. I have a very specialized taste. I buy



what I would like to use myself." As he points out particular ironwork, chandeliers, or mantels on a tour around the store, Nevinson, who calls himself "an apprentice for life," is a veritable architectural encyclopedia, facily lecturing on the history of the individual pieces and their respective historical and stylistic contexts.

"I care a great deal for the buildings like those from which our pieces were retrieved. When in Britain and on the continent, I take

every conceivable route to every public or private chateau. I immerse myself in the details. If you continue to observe small things carefully, you are learning everyday."

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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